



EXTENSION IMPACT

Supporting Food Entrepreneurs of Color

Business ownership serves as an important vehicle for wealth creation, especially for members of economically disadvantaged communities. Research shows that, in Wisconsin, Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) have disproportionately low levels of business ownership and have demonstrably weaker relationships with key people and institutions in the small business development field, such as lenders. Language barriers and lack of in-house legal and accounting expertise can also make it difficult for BIPOC small business owners to take advantage of federal assistance programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program, making their businesses more vulnerable during economic downturns. Despite these statistics, the food sector has some of the highest representation of BIPOC business ownership in Wisconsin and continues to be an arena in which BIPOC entrepreneurs pursue opportunities to develop new businesses and products. Because food businesses are subject to unique regulatory requirements, food business entrepreneurs require training in food safety protocol, licensing, and regulations that are not typically covered by traditional small business assistance providers.

Extension programming and resources enhance entrepreneurs' ability to make informed business decisions and foster professional network expansion.

In response, Extension launched its Food Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development Initiative in 2020. Extension's goal is to increase the proportion and enhance the success of BIPOC entrepreneurs, limited English speakers, recent immigrants, and others experiencing structural barriers to food business entrepreneurship in Wisconsin. The Program works with partners

across Extension and the state to support BIPOC food entrepreneurs in Wisconsin by creating spaces for them to connect with each other and with other existing infrastructure, expertise, and markets in culturally, technologically, and linguistically accessible ways.

Extension developed English- and Spanish-language guides for food cart operators to safely and successfully operate during the Covid-19 pandemic. The guides were distributed directly to over 350 entrepreneurs and service providers.

Extension delivered a series of online English- and Spanish-language food safety and licensing trainings that reached more than 160 food entrepreneurs and facility managers.

Extension organized a virtual Start-Up Summit that provided 151 food entrepreneurs with information, connections, and resources to help launch and sustain successful food businesses. Regional sessions (representing four areas of the state) complemented statewide offerings by providing opportunities for place-based networking and learning about local resources. Regional sessions were organized by county-based Extension educators in Crawford, Bayfield, Brown, and Dane counties and included entrepreneur panels, resource organization panels, pitch session networking, and updates on farmers markets and other marketing efforts. The evaluation of the summit demonstrated increased knowledge on key food business development topics, appreciation for the inclusive approach to programming, and participants' intent to use information gained to start and/or improve their food businesses.

A 2020-2021 UW-Madison Division of Extension Innovation Fund Grant will help the Community Food Systems Program expand this Initiative in 2021 through a needs and opportunities assessment, additional food business development trainings, and the development of online content that can be used as stand-alone resources or as part of in-person and online trainings.

in 2020



650+

entrepreneurs/technical assistance reached



72% increase
of entrepreneur's ability to find
resources to support their business
(Start Up-Summit participants)



The Community Food Systems program is part of Extension's Community Development Institute. Learn more by visiting foodsystems.extension.wisc.edu.



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